

Can Sex Sell Cable?

Video

HITCHCOCK
ON TAPE

The #1 Magazine Of Home Video

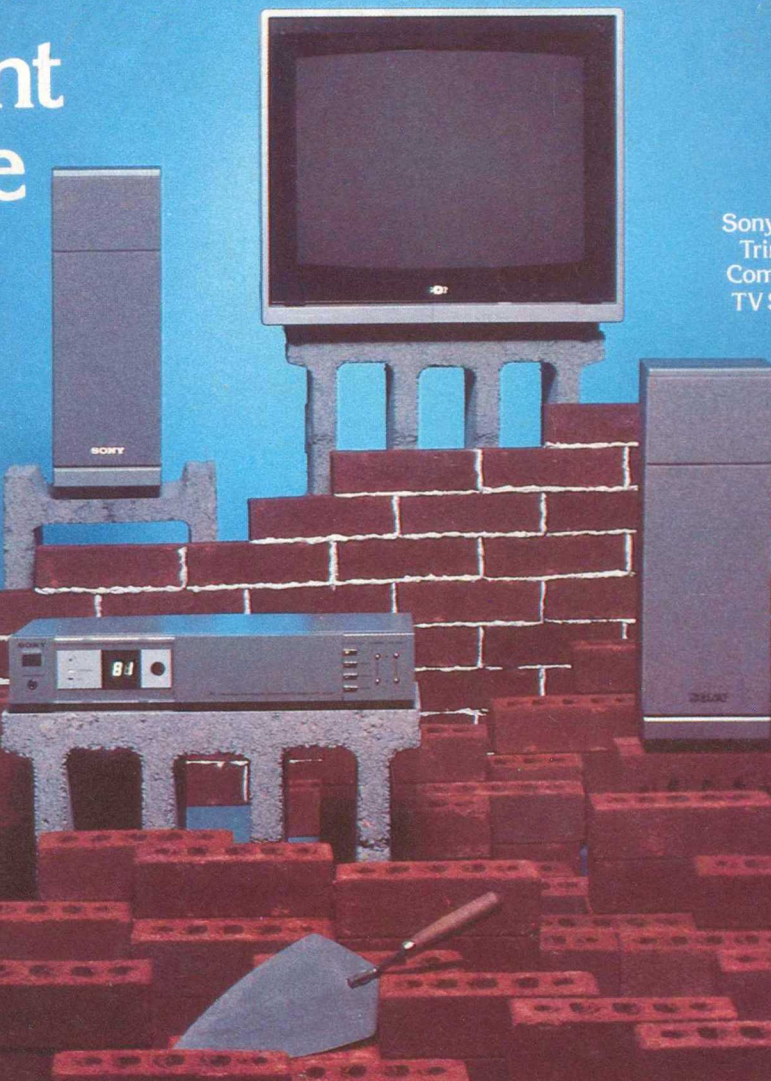
Low-Power TV: Buy Your Own Station
VCR Add-ons: What They Do, Which to Use
Videotaping with Two Cameras

BERGER-BRAITHWAITE VIDEOTESTS

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TV Is Here

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Cover photo by Alan Veldenzer.

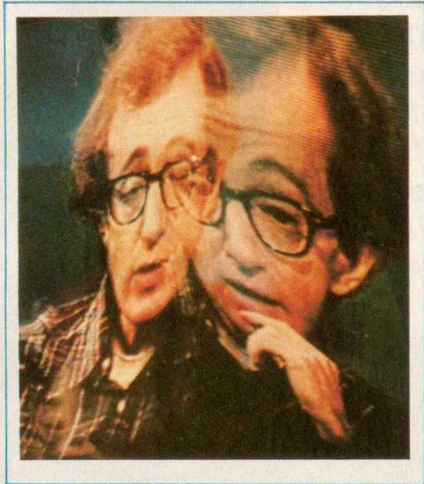


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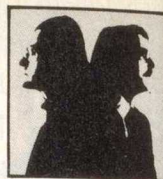
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PHOTO CREDITS: Les Morsillo—28, 44-5, 52-3; Alan Veldenzer—cover, 40-1; Peter Wilson—56-7 (top); Tom Brunstetter—56 (bottom), 58 (bottom); David Bloom—57 (bottom); Jann Zlotkin—58 (top)

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS: Frank Emmi—30, 32, 34, 39; Brent Bailer—48-9; Armando Baez—64-5; David Febland—73

VIDEO (ISSN 0147-8907) is published monthly by Reese Publishing Company, Inc., 235 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10003. Second-class postage rates paid at NY, NY and additional mailing office. © 1981 by Reese Publishing Company, Inc. All rights reserved. Under Universal, International and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction of the editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Single copy price \$1.75; \$2.00 in Canada; 1 Pound Sterling in U.K. One-year subscription (12 issues) \$15.00; Canada \$18.00 U.S.; foreign \$23.00 U.S. Address subscription orders to VIDEO, P.O. Box 1118, Dover, NJ 07801. Address all subscription correspondence and inquiries to VIDEO, P.O. Box 1116, Dover, NJ 07801. Change of address takes 60 days to process; send old address label, new address and zip code. All material listed in this magazine is subject to manufacturer's change without notice, and publisher assumes no responsibility for such changes. Printed in the U.S.A.

POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to VIDEO, P.O. Box 1116, Dover, NJ 07801.



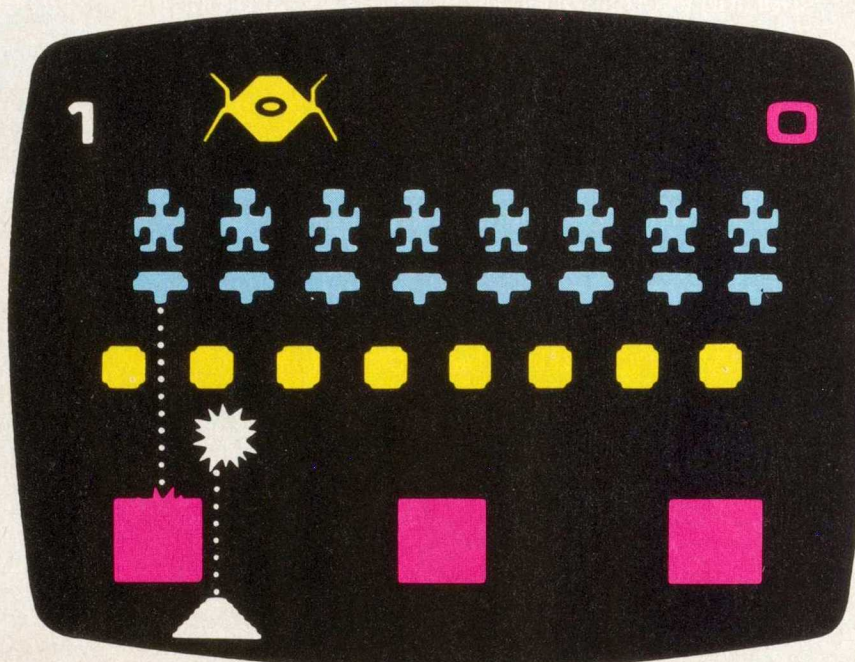
Three New Games: A Space Odyssey

Just about every corny science-fiction movie ever made ends on the same ominous note: As hero and heroine entwine in one final passionate clinch, the background music swells and the camera pans across banks of fleecy clouds. Then an authoritative off-screen voice thunders this dire warning: "Keep watching the skies!" The unmistakable implication is that there is yet another spaceship-load of extraterrestrial nasties to menace our beloved planet.

Video-game cartridges like "Cosmic Conflict" and "Invaders from Hyper-space" firmly established Odyssey's reputation for producing top-notch software with an outer-space theme. Since there can never be too many good science-fiction games, it's hardly surprising that arcaders have been watching the skies—and their local electronic-games outlets—for more galaxy-spanning adventure from the company. The manufacturer has amply rewarded the patience of Odyssey² system-owners by introducing two of the best science-fiction video games ever to explode across the home screen. This month's installment of "Arcade Alley" explores Odyssey's stardust twins, "UFO" and "Alien Invaders—Plus," and examines a third space odyssey some gamers may have overlooked.

In **UFO** (IB 3656-1), arcaders direct a robot-controlled flying saucer on a perilous space mission for the Earth Federation. The enemy regularly patrols this sector of space with light-speed spaceships capable of firing computer-guided missiles and also dispatches seemingly endless swarms of deadly satellites. These UFOs come in two lethal varieties: random-movers and hunter-killers. The former drift aimlessly through the void and disintegrate anything that crosses their paths, while the latter employ a heat-seeking tracking device capable of shadowing a quarry across the entire playfield if necessary.

Fortunately for the welfare of the Earth Federation, the friendly saucer boasts potent offensive and defensive weapons of its own. The craft, which slowly rotates on its axis thanks to a beautiful bit of computer animation, is completely surrounded by an impregnable force field indicated by a ring of 15 dots that encircles the flying saucer. This shield not only



'Alien Invaders' is a 'Space Invaders' variation in which players square off with a firing line of eight robots, using a joystick to manipulate laser cannon.

effectively neutralizes the missiles fired by the light-speed ships, it also atomizes marauding UFOs on contact. The same force field powers the Federation cruiser's powerful laser cannon. The position of the large white dot on the perimeter of the force field indicates the direction of fire. So the joystick not only determines the flight path of the friendly cruiser, but in addition orients the laser to fire on any of 15 compass headings.

Of course, there is a catch. Ramming the UFO with the shield or obliterating one with a laser bolt temporarily depletes the energy field. The "dots" of the force field turn black while the shield recharges, reverting to their normal blue color when the defensive screen and laser cannon are once more in operation. Obviously, the saucer is more vulnerable while it is powering up. Getting hemmed in by a pack of hunter-killer UFOs that strike the saucer in rapid succession or taking several consecutive missile hits from one of the light-speed ships are the two most frequent endings.

Players accumulate points by destroying UFOs. Random-motion satellites are worth one point, hunter-killer count three,

and the light-speed are 10-point prizes. As might be expected, the missile-firing starships are the toughest opponents. The single most crucial tactic decision facing players is whether to go after the patrol ship or hide safely behind a covey of random-motion UFOs. Running keeps the arcader in the game, but only taking a crack at the enemy light-speed ships whenever possible will produce a high score. Although the patrol craft shoot faster and farther than the Federation cruiser, they do have an Achilles heel: they can't fire missiles laterally. A swift approach by the saucer from due east or west of the light-speed ship leaves it defenseless against a ram or laser attack.

"UFO" keeps a running score in the lower right-hand corner, while the high total for the play session in progress is posted on the lower left-hand portion of the playfield. As an appealing arcade-like touch, the gamer who has achieved the high score can type his name onto the screen using the Odyssey² keyboard.

The game sparkles with audio and visual effects, including no less than three different explosions. Watching the

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movies. Though she doesn't own a television set, Hirschi contends that those who subscribe to these channels "lower the moral tone of the community."

The Utah cable law was to have gone into effect May 11, 1981, but four Utah cable companies and Home Box Office challenged it, calling its wording so vague that it would have prevented even such critically acclaimed films as *Kramer vs. Kramer* from being shown. Some critics contended that the law could have also prohibited showing a baby's bare bottom in a diaper commercial or a photograph of a work of classical sculpture depicting a nude body, such as the "Venus de Milo." Most importantly, the law would have held cable operators liable, even if the offending program were being shown on broadcast television and simply carried on cable. Four days before it was to have gone into effect, Federal Judge Bruce S. Jenkins issued a temporary restraining order against the new law, ruling that it was, "on its face," unconstitutional (First and Fourteenth Amendments) and criticizing it as a "defect in draftsmanship."

Focus on Feedback

In Utah, the prospect of adult cable channels prompted a loud response, but this hasn't always been the case, according to programmers. Both TeleMine's Shepard and Escapade's O'Grady say subscribers to adult channels do object to violence, and Shepard says language can be a problem. Viewers don't mind strong language as long as it's "locker-room talk" or is set "on the job," but are angered if it is spoken by a woman or child. She also says that while customers "like to be titillated, they don't want to be overly shocked."

Escapade has received some negative response, according to O'Grady, "but I don't consider three or four people any kind of backlash when the switchboard was flooded with orders for the service. In Buffalo, there were front-page newspaper stories about us when we were introduced on the cable system. All it did was add to our subscriber base."

Fox of Satori claims "it's a myth that subscribers to adult services are different than subscribers to foundation pay services. We haven't had a single complaint in Boston," he adds, saying he thinks the market for adult films will grow among "women who have never gone downtown, never gone to the peepshows." Response to the four or five late-night adult films shown each month on ON-TV, Los Angeles' successful subscription channel, is similar. ON's Jeff Flower says negative response usually comes in two forms: disappointed subscribers angry that hardcore erotic sequences have been cut from films, and women who want to see more male nudity.

Despite objections that may be raised as adult channels work their way onto the

nation's cable systems, no one connected with any of the channels sees "community standards" getting in the way. "We're going to have all the protection that magazines have under the First Amendment," says Fox, "because subscribing to an adult service is a willful and knowing purchase decision."

The future of adult channels could be rosy, as these programmers suggest, but none of the services has yet attained the kind of commercial success originally predicted. Though all the services are in their infancy, fewer than a half-million cable subscribers have chosen to get them.

Win or lose, the adult channels are rewriting television history. There is little

question that we won't be chalking up moral benchmarks in terms of what can or cannot be shown on television much longer.



Arcade Alley

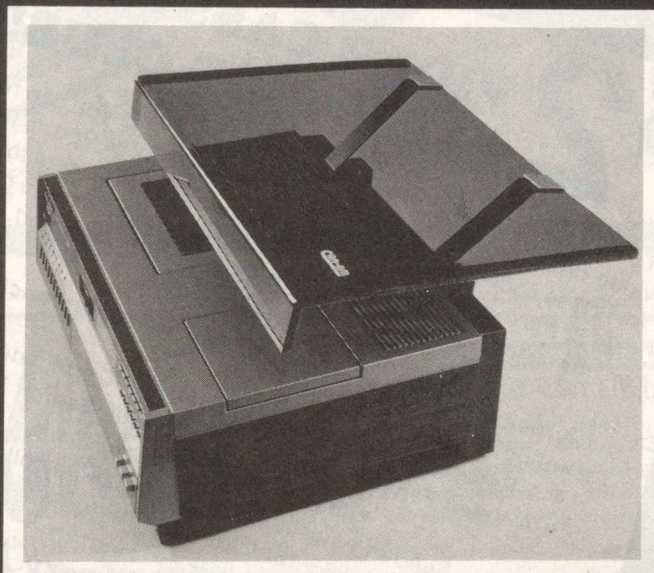
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saucer go through its pulsating sequence of color changes almost takes the sting out of getting destroyed.

One caution: this game resets automatically after each round. Arcaders have been known to sit before the TV for hours in the grip of "UFO" 's near-hypnotic allure.

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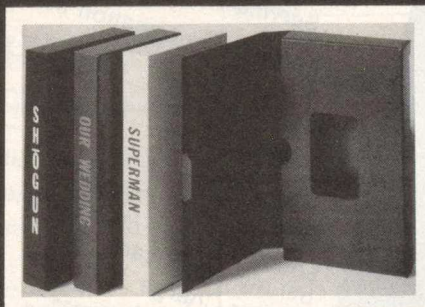


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Video 101

Alien Invaders — Plus (IB3634-1) is a surprisingly innovative switcheroo on good old "Space Invaders." The arcader uses the joystick to move a mobile laser cannon and its robot operator horizontally back and forth across the bottom of the playfield. Advancing toward this defensive position is a line of eight evil robots, each armed with a laser cannon. A line of eight impenetrable shields protects the computer-controlled attack force, while the arcader's cannon is screened by a trio of high-density molecular laser shields.

The enemy robots also have a guiding spirit in the form of the Merciless Monstroth. It starts the game zipping back and forth across the top of the screen above its android legion, but eventually it begins to swoop low for periodic dive-bombing runs against the beleaguered defender. Worst of all, the Monstroth is more or less unkillable. If there is even one robot invader left on the screen, the Monstroth regenerates in just a few seconds.

If the player's cannon is hit, it leaves the robot unprotected against a killing laser blast from above. Moving the defender directly under one of the big square shields converts it into a new cannon. After all the shields are used up replacing the cannon and the forces of evil have knocked out the fourth cannon, the hapless robot defender might as well surrender because there is no longer any way to blast the mechanical tormenters. The gamer wins a round by clearing the board of enemy robots, their lasers, and that cheerleading Monstroth. The computer comes out on top if the arcader fails to accomplish this. When one side wins 10 rounds, a victory trumpet sounds to salute the triumph.

Though there are only eight attackers, "Alien Invaders—Plus" is no pushover. To win, a player must work rapidly, skragging the computer's lasers first and then going to work on the robot gunners. Since it has no effect on the score, there's no reason to worry about the Monstroth until it starts to swoop—and then it must be watched constantly.

"Alien Invaders — Plus" makes a nice change of pace from the usual run of space-invasion games because it is less derivative by far than most of them. Not just a pallid "Space Invaders" clone, this is a unique and entertaining S-F videogame.

Out of this World (IB3536-1) is a colorful and entertaining lunar-lander game that should be perfect for novices who might find other Odyssey space games too demanding. It's also an ideal way to introduce younger brothers and sisters to the joys of home arcading.

This two-player contest challenges arcaders to land a spacecraft on the surface of the moon, take off again, and dock with a mothership. Pressing the action button on the joystick fires the retro-rockets that make gentle landings possi-

ble and also provide the thrust for the takeoff. Power is limited and must be used sparingly or the gamer will end up piloting a dead hulk. Three variants allow progressively more demanding levels of play. One option simulates gravitational conditions that would occur on the Moon, the second represents Mars; the most demanding pits the arcader against the planet Jupiter.

This cartridge has an extra bonus in the form of a second game, "Helicopter Rescue." It's a race against the clock to save people from a doomed skyscraper, enhanced by colorful graphics that will keep youngsters entertained for hours.



Theater...

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film pro John Frankenheimer (*The Manchurian Candidate*, *The French Connection II*) and splendidly acted by a choice cast that includes Lee Marvin in the lead role, Fredric March, and Robert Ryan.

Also noteworthy is *Butley* by Simon Gray, a drama that is mesmerizing despite its severely circumscribed action (confined to a single small office room) and unrestrained wordiness. Alan Bates delivers a bravura performance in the title role as the most thoroughly unlikeable character in modern drama. The film is directed by Harold Pinter, Britain's foremost contemporary playwright, who also directed the original stage production.

Honor Roll

Equally notable: Pinter's own *The Homecoming*, starring his talented ex-wife, Vivian Merchant—one of the most bizarre family dramas and one of the most enigmatic love stories ever brought to the stage; French dramatist Jean Genet's *The Maids*, with Glenda Jackson and Susanah York in a production that makes effective and appropriate use of mirror shots; and Bertholt Brecht's powerful *Galileo*, directed by veteran stage and film director Joseph Losey, who directed the most successful American theater production of this work in 1947, working closely with Brecht.

Although the American Film Theatre productions were originally designed for viewing on the large screen, they hold many lessons on how to transpose theatrical works to video. When I first saw a few of these films in a movie theater, I was disappointed. Even the best of these productions are not intensely filmic in the manner of a film by Hitchcock or Stanley Kubrick. But that's to be expected when going to the movies. Viewing these works on videocassette, with different expectations, they are much more satisfying.



Videology

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A number of European Common Market electronics manufacturers—Phillips, Thompson-CSF, Texas Instruments—France, Mullard—are developing semiconductor chip sets to produce economical sets for teletext. But the key to the future of teletext production for the U.S. market rests in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. In addition, the Asian video manufacturers have developed a fourth TV text system called Captain which reproduces Oriental ideog-

raphical picture-writing (which is limited in reproduction by the other three teletext systems).

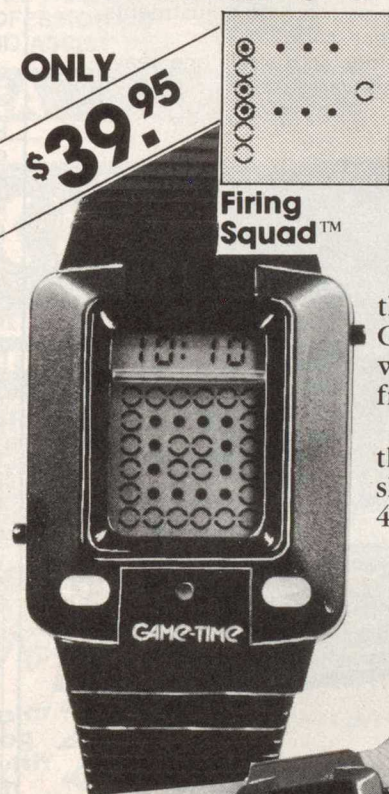
The hook for the Asian mass-market television manufacturers must be an enhanced language-graphics capability for all alphabets from Roman to Arabic, and a single standard to allow economical production and sales of teletext/videotext sets and adapters. The home-video consumer will buy electronic text only if it is easily affordable, and that remains true all over the world.

The final question remains the future involvement of the Bell System in providing video information to the home. There is a strong possibility that Bell will serve the home with electronic information in

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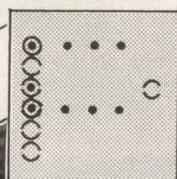
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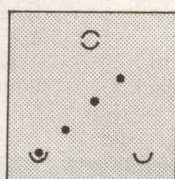


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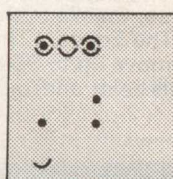
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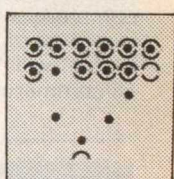
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